Yarning about parenthood and your bub
Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the support of the following organisations and people. The Australian Government for assisting with the development of the What Were We Thinking! program and for additional funding for specific components from the Jack Brockhoff Foundation, the Archer Trust, the Besen Family Foundation and the Eirene Lucas Trust.

This booklet has been adapted from the What Were We Thinking! program, developed by Professor Jane Fisher and Dr Heather Rowe at Monash University.

This resource was funded by Jean Hailes for Women’s Health by a grant from the Collie Foundation, which is managed by Equity Trustees. We are very grateful to Terori Hareko-Samios for the cultural translation of this resource and for enabling extensive community consultation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. We also wish to acknowledge Salt Studios for facilitating the inspiring artwork of Kate Russell, which is featured throughout the resource.

We also acknowledge the beautiful cover photos provided to us by Justice Nelson and the Apunipima Cape York Health Council.
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Introduction

In this book you will read about common experiences of first-time parents in the first six months of parenthood, and some helpful ways of thinking about and managing them.

We hope this book will help you grow in confidence and understanding and increase your enjoyment of these special moments as a family.

This book is drawn from the best research evidence as well as the wide experience of parents of new babies.

The birth of your first baby changes your life in so many ways. These changes come with mixed feelings as you adjust to your new role and the responsibilities that come with being a new parent.
It is ok if you don’t feel ready!

There are usually mixed feelings in the time following the birth of your bub: moments of joy, uncertainty and sometimes intense worry.

Caring for a baby can be physically and emotionally tiring.

Don’t feel worried if you don’t always know what to do; there is a lot to learn.

Yarning with family and friends about supporting you with your bub can make a difference.

Taking care of how you are feeling in the early months is important to your health and the health of your bub.

Bubs feel safe and loved when they are part of a family. Balancing your own needs and the needs of your bub is not easy, but it is important to find time for you.

Try to work out what is important and what needs to be done now, and what can be left until later.

A baby’s brain is like a sponge that absorbs what’s happening in the world around them; they learn from their mum, their dad, the other family members, and the environment.
Each bub is different

Just as we have our own different personalities that make us who we are, bubs do too. You can see this as early as the first weeks of life.

What is your bub’s temperament?

You will begin to get to know your bub’s temperament over time. For example, does your bub respond happily to new activities or does your bub get upset easily? This is your bub’s temperament.

What is your bub’s temperament?

How does your bub respond to new people and places?

Very confident  Sometimes confident  Not confident

How easily soothed or comforted is your bub?

Easily comforted  Sometimes easily comforted  Not easily comforted

Is your bub calm or fussy while they are being bathed or dressed?

Very calm  Sometimes calm/fussy  Very fussy

How predictable is your bub?

For example, do they wake at the same time every day?

Very predictable  Sometimes predictable  Not predictable
As a parent, it is important to get to know your bub’s individual personality. Introducing bub to your mob and community can be a fun and enjoyable experience, but remember that it is best for bub if this is done slowly and in little steps. They can be overwhelmed if too much happens all at once. Be gentle and encouraging if they are shy.

Each bub responds to new experiences differently. If your bub is cranky, try to set up a routine. If each day follows much the same pattern of activities, bub will feel safe.

Remember:
Learning about your bub’s unique temperament takes time and every bub is different.

It is important not to label bub as being ‘GOOD’ or being ‘BAD’.
Understanding bub’s cry

Your bub’s cry can be very upsetting, especially if it is intense and goes on for a long time. Often parents are told to try to recognise bub’s different cries and decide what these mean, but it is very difficult to tell one cry from another. We don’t know why some bubs cry for long periods of time, but this does not mean that you’re doing something wrong.

Here are some helpful things to think about:

- A bub can become unsettled if there is too much going on. Putting your bub to bed in a quiet environment can help them to get to sleep.
- It is helpful for parents to have a number of ways to soothe their bub – using a soft voice, repetitive sounds, firm slow patting and less eye contact can help too.
- A good idea is to have some cuddle time – firmly hold bub in your arms or over your shoulder.
- Babies cry more when they don’t have enough sleep.
- After a bath, give your bub a massage to help soothe them.
Feed – play – sleep routine

Bubs are happier when their day is structured around their needs and the needs of their family. The feed-play-sleep routine is a really important part of bub’s day at any age. It makes life easier.

It is a good idea for each day to follow a similar routine and structure. As your bub grows, their needs change; for instance, their feeds get shorter, play time gets longer and sleep time gets shorter. Remember that bubs thrive when they know what to expect next.

**Feeding**
- Feed bub at the start of each cycle of the routine
- Bubs who have had a good sleep feed better
- In the first few weeks, each of your bub’s feeds lasts around 45 minutes. These get a bit shorter as the baby grows

**Playing**
- Play time is important for your bub’s mental and physical development
- Activities for play time include massage, looking at a book together, looking at you and ‘talking’ together, bath time, tummy time, going for a walk or visiting your mob
- After playing for a while, your bub will start to look tired; they might start wriggling, grizzling and rubbing their eyes

**Sleeping**
- Make bub comfortable and explain quietly that it is time for sleep
- Until your bub is four months old, wrap them firmly in a shawl or wrap. After four months, use a baby-safe sleeping bag
- During the day, bubs need a sleep in the morning and in the afternoon
Enough sleep

While your bub sleeps, they are growing and developing. Sleep is very important for the health of your bub. Getting enough sleep will make bub happier, easier to care for and will improve their learning. A bub who does not have enough sleep is grumpy and unhappy.

- Bubs might need help to go to sleep
- Bubs will learn quickly it is sleep time if there is a daily routine
- Yarn with your partner about what works in helping bub sleep

Settling your bub

Sleep and settling routines need to be simple and easy for mum, dad and bub to follow, whether you’re all at home or out together. Bubs need signs from you to help them relax and be ready for sleep.
Here are some ways to help your bub to sleep:

- Notice bub’s ‘tired signs’ such as starting to grizzle, rubbing their eyes and ears, yawning or wriggling. Your bub may also look bored or less interested in their surroundings or toys.
- Start using a sign for sleep. For example, putting bub to bed and saying, “Time for sleep now”. Use the same sign each time so that bub gets to know sleep time.
- Make your bub comfortable by wrapping them in a wrap or thin shawl.
- Soothe your bub by speaking or singing in a quiet voice, making soft sounds and slow movements.
- Put your bub to bed in a dark room. It is easier for bub to sleep in the dark.
- Put your bub to bed on their back and tuck them firmly into bed with their feet at the end of the cot.
- Pat your bub with cupped hands at a steady slow beat until they are quiet. Some bubs like to hear a shushing sound… shhh… shhh.
- Try not to make eye contact with your bub.
- Re-settle your bub if necessary. Sometimes bubs wake up about 45 minutes after being put to sleep – this is only one ‘sleep cycle’ and is not enough time for rest and growth.
- Aim for bub to have a couple of hours of sleep during the day.
- Yarn with your partner about what works in helping put bub to sleep. Bubs feel safe if both parents (or whoever is caring for them for that matter) use the same ways to settle and re-settle them.

Wrapping baby
When your bub is awake

When your bub is awake they are learning about the world around them and their brain is growing and developing. Early experiences of being with family, friends and community, and listening to the family yarn helps to develop bub’s sense of hearing, sight, smell and helps bub learn about how people get on with each other.

Here are some things you can do together with bub:

- Take your bub to meet other bubs at mothers’ group, playgroup or with your mob
- Massage your bub
- Read to your bub
- Say words in language (if you know them) to your bub
- Talk gently to and smile at your bub
- Sing to and cuddle your bub
- Take your bub out when they are awake
- Allow bub to discover their world
- Understand that while your bub is small, they need to be treated as a baby, not an adult
- Make sure that your bub experiences different surroundings, such as the stroller, on the floor, in your arms
Remembering bub’s birth

Some women remember the birth of their bub for years afterwards. Whatever your experience was of bub’s birth, it is good to yarn about the good and bad things that have happened.

Remembering your bub’s birth

- It is good to yarn about the birth to each other
- Some men find the experience of childbirth too much for them to handle and talk about
- Sometimes women feel shocked, sad or even horrified by what happened when they gave birth
- Some men feel ignored during childbirth and they can feel helpless watching their partner in pain
- Pain from problems during or after birth can be intense and lasting
- The birth may not be the way you hoped or imagined it would be
- Some people remember the birth with joy and satisfaction
Yarning about the birth:

- Understand that some people want to yarn about their bub’s birth
- Remember that even if you don’t want to yarn about it, you may remember your experience at unexpected times
- Yarn with your partner about bub’s birth
- It is unhelpful to say, “Don’t whinge, you have a healthy bub!”
- Listen to each other’s feelings and experiences of the birth
- Try not to make critical remarks about the changes in a woman’s body shape or size
- Try not to compare your birthing experience to others – remember that everyone is different
- It is unhelpful to say, “It’s in the past…get on with it” or say, “You’ll forget about it in time”
Balancing the good and the bad

The birth of bub brings both positive and not-so positive thoughts and feelings.

Your bub may bring good thoughts like:

- I am a mother
- I feel happy having bub
- We have a beautiful healthy bub
- We are a family
- There is someone to carry on the family name, and to teach tradition and culture
- There is someone to love and hold
- I have something in common with other mothers
- This is a big event to mark our journey together as a family

Or not-so good thoughts like:

- I don’t feel as free as I used to
- My life has changed so much
- I can’t spend as much time with my partner
- There is no one to yarn with about what I did today
- I feel overwhelmed with my new responsibilities
- My body shape and size has changed
After the birth of bub, your partner might think:

- I am happy I’m a parent
- We have a beautiful bub to love and hold and someone to pass on cultural knowledge to
- We made a family together – I have something in common with other parents

Or could also think:

- We have less time together
- I have less time to myself
- I have less time to just hang out with family and friends
- I have less time to do what I want to do
The things you say and do

The things we say and do can have a big effect on our partners, especially after the birth of a bub. When we are feeling frustrated and exhausted, we can say things that are hurtful and that we don’t really mean.

Some helpful things to think about:

- This is part of my life, it is my family journey
- Our bub will grow and life will get easier
- Remember what you loved about each other before the birth of bub
- How to be supportive around the home, with bub and with each other
- People may do things differently but it doesn’t mean they are wrong
- This is all new and we are both learning

Some suggestions for partners:

You could say:

- Do you want to get some rest?
- I’ll do the dishes
- This is hard but we’ll get through it together
- You’re doing a deadly job
- It doesn’t matter if the house is messy

You could do:

- Come home and see what needs doing and do it without being asked
- Take bub with you when you go out
- Take some time to stop and calm down when you feel frustrated
- Be gentle with each other and remember that you are both learning together
- Take turns getting up at night to settle bub
- Try and get some time together without bub
What were we thinking!

Having a bub is a permanent change for life. There will be happy times and there will be challenging times. Having a bub means responsibilities that you may not have thought of until bub arrived.

Before bub you may have thought:

● How hard can it be to have a bub? I’m from a big mob, my mother raised eight kids!
● My relationship with my partner is rock solid so we’ll still be the same as we used to be
● Bub will bring us closer together
● Bub will fit into our way of life and the things we do – we won’t need to change
● I’ll still be interested in having sex with my partner
● My mother breastfed, so I will too because it looks easy
● My partner and I will share the workload of looking after bub and the household chores

Before bub your partner may have thought:

● My partner will be a natural mother because she came from a big family
● Things will be more organised because she will be at home with bub
● Bub will fit into our lives
● I can still go out with my friends – my partner will be happy to manage the bub and home
● We will still have sex with each other
● Looking after bub is women’s business

Learning to cope and adjust to your new life will take time. Life is not worse, just different.

● Take care of each other
● Help each other
● Be kind to each other. This will make you feel more love towards each other
Jobs around the house and caring for a bub are not always thought of as ‘work’. But these tasks are work that is unpaid. Partners need to talk about how to share the work so it feels fair.

Before the birth of a bub you might not think it’s important to yarn about workloads. It might help to talk about it because ‘who does what around the house’ can cause problems between you. Have a yarn about dividing the workload when you are not tired and can talk calmly to each other. Work out a way of sharing the work that feels fair.
The family

We are all influenced by our upbringing, our cultural backgrounds and our beliefs. It is important to yarn about these and consider what aspects of your background you would like to teach your child and what you want to leave behind.

Remember that working things out together is part of the journey towards becoming a strong and united family.

It is helpful to consider styles of parenting:

- Think about how you want raise your bub
- Think about what ways you want to care for your bub and children differently from how you were cared for as a child
- It is important that both parents have a say in:
  - religion
  - cultural tradition
  - attitudes to discipline

Most new parents want to do at least some things differently from how their parents did them.

It is helpful to consider:

- How you want to divide the workload in your own family
- How you did things before bub came home and what might work better now
Life with a new bub

Being a new parent brings happiness and many wonderful experiences together. However, when things are difficult it can be hard to find the right words.

After bub you may be having thoughts like:

- I am irritable and cranky a lot of the time, especially with the people close to me
- The house is a mess and I’ve no time to do anything else but look after bub’s needs
- I want my partner to understand what it is like at home with bub
- I don’t understand why he is complaining about being tired when I get less sleep, I am at home with bub all day and I am doing most of the house chores
- Why doesn’t my partner change nappies, bath bub and cook for us?
- I think he believes that looking after bub is women’s business
After bub your partner may be having thoughts like:

- There are a lot of demands on me from work and at home
- She’s not working so I don’t understand why she is complaining
- She criticises me when I try to look after bub
- The house is always a mess, what does she do all day?
- She does not want to have sex with me
- We are both so tired now and argue about little things

In this together

It can be difficult for both parents when bub arrives but it is helpful to remember that you are in this together.

- Appreciate what your partner is doing for the family. This could be working outside the home or working at home, looking after the baby
- Make sure you ask your partner to do their share. It is a good idea to be specific about things they can do; “it’s your turn to give the bub a bath tonight”
- Talk to each other about the changes in your life and how you are feeling
- Acknowledge that you are both very tired and try to sleep when you can
- Recognise that lack of sleep can make people say things that they wouldn’t normally say
Community and family matters a lot

Community and family can help the confidence of new parents by:

- Offering to help by doing the washing or cooking
- Saying good things about how they are parenting
- Giving praise and encouragement

Community and family can hurt the confidence of new parents by:

- Criticising how they are bringing up their bub
- Taking over the care of bub
- Telling the new parents there is only one way to be a parent
Yarn up

Sometimes our families and community mob can say things that are upsetting like: “Your bub is very small.”

It is important that you are able to yarn up for yourself to community and family about how they make you feel.

Yarning up can be helped by:

- Saying clearly what you want to say
- Giving examples of what you are talking about
- Talking about how you feel

It is a good idea to have some good responses ready. For example, if someone offers to help, tell them:

“Yes, great, how is Friday for you?”

“I’d like some help with hanging the washing out.”
If someone says something that hurts you, like:
“You are too young to be a mother”, you might say:

“I really love being a mother and I feel like I can be a good mum.”

“I’m young, I’m strong and love having my bub.”

“I really wanted a bub and I am so happy to be a mother.”

Everyone needs help with:
- Caring for bub, family and the home
- Getting the social and emotional support needed to deal with the new challenges the bub brings

When help is hard to find:
- Look for ways you can connect with supportive people – if you don’t have family then maybe join groups such as a playgroup, mothers’ group or other local baby group
Going it alone

There are a lot of reasons why you might be parenting alone. It is important to get the help and support you need:

- Find support from other single parents
- Spend time with people who make you feel supported and reassured
- If you feel uncertain, have contact numbers of health professionals or people you trust

Some important things to remember:

- No one is an expert at the beginning of any new journey
- The more time you spend with bub, the better you will both understand each other
- Consider health professionals such as counsellors, home visitors, community nurses and your maternal and child health nurse to help you in your new journey